



## BLM-WINNEMUCCA FIELD OFFICE PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Presented to the:

**Legislative Committee on Public Lands**

Chairman: Senator Dean A. Rhoads

Vice-Chairman: Assemblyman John W. Marvel

**April 4, 2008**

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### ENERGY

#### Geothermal Exploration

- Winnemucca Field Office (WFO) has authorized a geothermal operating plan for the Blue Mountain Geothermal Power Project.
- Battle Mountain Field Office (BMFO) is taking the lead in preparing an environmental assessment (EA) for the Buffalo Valley and Jersey Valley geothermal projects. The proposed projects include a power plant in each district (Battle Mountain and Winnemucca), linked by a transmission line.
- WFO has received a preliminary proposal from Ormat for exploration of their geothermal leases in the area of Fireball Ridge, about 20 miles north of Fernley. WFO is in the early stages of the permitting process established for expedited review of drilling proposals.

### MINERALS

**Coeur Rochester** – Work is still continuing on the Preliminary Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Expansion and Closure of the mine.

### LANDS AND REALTY

**Land Sales** – Within the past year we have completed the following land sales:

| <u>Sale</u>                   | <u>Acreage</u> | <u>Location</u> |
|-------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|
| Desert Valley                 | 1909.58        | Humboldt County |
| Golconda Butte                | 1200           | Humboldt County |
| Pleasant Valley               | 798.04         | Pershing County |
| Winn. Airport Industrial Park | <u>177.31</u>  | Humboldt County |
| Total Acreage                 | 4084.93        |                 |

The Jungo Hills-Schoolhouse Butte Sale is a separate agenda item and will be discussed later.

#### SNPLMA Acquisitions

1. Mr. Todd Jaksick is currently working with the BLM for a possible sale of approximately 18,000 acres in northern Washoe County. The proposed sale will

involve three field offices, and the WFO portion is approximately 11,000 acres, mostly in the Granite Range northwest of Gerlach. The appraisal review was completed in January and a purchase offer was sent to Mr. Jaksick in February. This sale would bring important wildlife habitat into the public domain.

2. A new acquisition within the WFO has been approved by the Secretary of the Interior, and work on that project is just beginning. The proposal is to purchase approximately 831 acres of land in the Black Rock Desert-High Rock Canyon Emigrant Trails National Conservation Area (NCA) in the Little High Rock Canyon/Hardin City area, and 451 acres in the Poodle Mountain Wilderness Study Area. The private lands are also owned by Mr. Jaksick.

### **Major Rights of Way Projects:**

1. The Aqua Trac pipeline project has entered a new research phase, with the applicant requesting approval of sites for meteorological towers to gather precipitation data. This data will mostly likely be used to support a revised application to the State Engineer. Concurrently, the applicant is appealing the State Engineer's 2007 ruling that denied the initial application.
2. In December 2007, the WFO issued a right-of-way grant for a 22-mile transmission line south of Blue Mountain. This line is part of the Nevada Geothermal Power Project.
3. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) is the lead agency for the proposed 650-mile Ruby Pipeline Project from Wyoming to Oregon. About 140 miles of the proposed route crosses the Winnemucca District. WFO staff is working with FERC and the applicant to prepare the environmental impact statement.
4. The Springer Mine in Pershing County has submitted requests for at least five rights-of-way needed to reopen the existing tungsten mine on private land. Work is underway on an EA.

## **RECREATION & CULTURAL RESOURCES**

1. A local "Friends" group is forming in Winnemucca. These groups typically establish themselves as non-profit organizations and partner with land management agencies such as the BLM. Current members of the group include visitors that enjoy a wide variety of recreation in and around the Sonoma Range. Meetings are the first Wednesday of the month, 6:00 pm at the Martin Hotel in Winnemucca. The group will host a National Trails Day event in Water Canyon on June 7<sup>th</sup>.
2. Earth Day activities are planned for Water Canyon on April 19, 2008. The primary task for the day will be to plant over 500 native trees and shrubs in the burned riparian areas of Water Canyon. Partners will include: Nevada Outdoor School (NOS), Northern Nevada ATV Association, the "Friends" Group, and the 6<sup>th</sup> Judicial Court Juvenile Work Crew.

3. May is Archeological Awareness and Historic Preservation Month. This year's theme is "America's New Deal Heritage" in honor of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the New Deal. During the 1930's there were many Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) projects completed for the Grazing Service as well as other agencies in the area. On Saturday May 31, the cultural staff, assisted by Mike Whalen from the WFO Division of Fire, will be leading a public tour of CCC sites starting from the Humboldt County Museum.
4. Lovelock Cave & Lovelock Museum field trips for several hundred Humboldt County and Winnemucca 4th graders will be conducted on May 6-8 in conjunction with the NOS. This event has turned into an annual affair, and is part of the agency's observance of Nevada Archeology Awareness and Historic Preservation Month. We are also continuing to work with NOS to develop a docent program for Lovelock Cave so that we can offer regular tours to the general public. A clean-up day at the cave for high school students will be hosted by NOS on April 15.
5. The WFO recreation staff will continue to use a comprehensive suite of GPS & GIS tools to monitor Special Recreation Permits. This spring, staff will document the condition of the four motorcycle race courses used this past year. In addition, we are currently working with the Motorcycle Racing Association of Northern Nevada to finish a GPS project started several years ago. The goal of this project is to GPS all currently approved routes in our data base. About ¼ of the routes in the database were manually digitized from hand drawn routes on 1:24,000 USGS quadrangles.

## **FISHERIES**

- Working on an EA for the Mud Meadows Fish Barrier near Soldier Meadows to protect the federally listed desert dace.
- Working on an EA for the reintroduction of Lahontan cutthroat trout into Pole Creek in the Montana Mountains.

## **WILDLIFE**

- Continue to maintain and GPS the locations of wildlife exclosures.
- Completed two winter raptor surveys in coordination with the Nevada Department of Wildlife (NDOW).
- Support NDOW sage-grouse lek surveys with Challenge Cost Share funding.

## **WILD HORSES AND BURROS**

From 1977 through the present, 44,776 wild horses and 2,166 burros have been removed from public lands administered by the WFO.

- Gathered the Augusta Mountains Herd Management Area (HMA) to low Appropriate Management Level (AML) last November – 228 wild horses were removed. This was a crucial gather due to loss of wild horse habitat from recent wild fires and long-term drought impacts.
- A coordinated census of five additional HMAs on the District's westside in conjunction with the Surprise Field Office (5 HMAs as well) was conducted in March

2008. This comprehensive census project covered over 1.5 million acres of adjacent HMAs administered by two BLM Field Offices. During the census 2,080 wild horses and burros were counted on the five WFO HMAs, which is approximately 1,100 head over the high AML of 976.

- Field tours of the Tobin Range and North Stillwaters HMAs are scheduled to occur this April to assess resource conditions and review the appropriateness of the gather schedule.

## **RANGE**

- Completed several permit renewal EAs and have issued decisions on 5 fully processed permits.
- The final grazing decision for the Soldier Meadows Allotment was issued in January. Appeals and petitions for stay were received from Western Watersheds Project (WWP) and Cindy MacDonald (wild horse advocate). An appeal was also received from the permittee but no stay was requested. Cindy MacDonald's appeal was dismissed as being filed untimely and the request for a stay by WWP was denied.
- Issued fifteen fire closure decisions for the 2007 wildfires.
- WWP filed a FOIA request for all information we have in the office for the nine allotments where EAs were prepared for grazing permit renewals in FY07. This has taken a lot of the staff's time away from working on grazing permit renewals.
- The WFO impounded 142 head of trespass cattle south of Winnemucca and 95 head of trespass horses at McDermitt in January 2008. In cooperation with Nevada Department of Agriculture, BLM sold 58 cows and 35 horses. The State sold 60 horses under the estray laws. The remaining animals were claimed by the owners. The owners, which are non-permittees, are being held responsible for the cost of the impoundment and have been issued either a written warning or a citation. Additional citations and impoundments are planned in the future as trespasses are discovered.

## **FIRE**

### **Operations/Aviation**

- Plan to staff eleven (11) fire engines, one Dozer, one Water Tender and one to two Single Engine Air Tankers.
- Receiving two new fire engines this spring, one 2,500 gallon high mobility Tatra fire engine and one 750 gallon Type 4 fire engine.
  - Winnemucca
    - 6 - fire engines -Various Types
    - 1 - D6 Dozer
    - 1 - Type 2 3,500 gallon Water Tender
  - Winnemucca Airport
    - 1-2 Single Engine Air Tankers
  - McDermitt
    - 2 - fire engines - 850 gallon Type 4
  - Lovelock
    - 2 - fire engines - 850 gallon Type 4
  - Paradise Valley

- 1 - fire engine - 750 gallon Type 4
- Will be providing Volunteer Fire Departments with fire refresher training and preseason coordination.

### **Fuels Management**

Fuels Management Plans – Specific allotments - Approximately 10 plans – Prepared by a private consultant – None implemented to date based on the following:

- Grazing Use proposed outside of season of permit.
- Requires High amounts of TNR.
- Excessive infrastructure needed, including fencing and waters, which would involve water rights issues. The Bureau cannot expend funds on water projects if we do not have water rights.
- Section 7 consultation needed for at least 3 of the allotments.
- Lone Willow PMU - prescribed burns were proposed within sage-grouse habitat.
- Permittees did not want to follow the proposed grazing systems in the plans, just wanted improvements.
- Permittees transferring their grazing preference to other individuals.
- All of the above actions require NEPA to implement – the fuels management plans did not include a NEPA document.
- Other permittees were concerned with these allotments receiving supplies to complete maintenance on projects when supplies are normally a responsibility of the permittees.
- FY09 – Santa Rosa project – Proposed fuel break to be accomplished in multi-year phases along the west flank of the Santa Rosa Range. Would tie into a Forest Service fuel break near McDermitt and would go through a number of allotments that were addressed in the previous plans. Project coordination and collaboration with NDOW, Forest Service and Fish & Wildlife Service.

### **Mitigation/Education/Prevention**

- Completed the Unionville Community Wildfire Protection Plan.
- Beginning the Community Wildfire Protection Plans for Denio and McDermitt.

### **Emergency Stabilization and Rehabilitation (ES&R)**

- All ES&R project work completed with the exception of fence repair/replacement on 3 fires where access is still limited.
- 47,361 total acres seeded

#### **Thomas Fire – Emergency Rehabilitation**

- 153 acres – Helicopter mulching
- Road Maintenance/Installation of Erosion Control Structures
- 1,585 acres - Drill Seeding
- 6,008 acres - Aerial Seeding
- 20 miles – fence repair
- Water Canyon Creek – channel realignment and slope stabilization
- Hazard tree removal and installation of public safety signs

### **Fire Planning**

- New Fire Program Analysis (FPA) models will be implemented during this year and submitted in December 2008.

### **Wildfire Support Group (WSG)**

- WSG personnel and equipment will be fully trained and available by June 1.

### **WINNEMUCCA RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN (WFO RMP)**

An extension of the RMP due date has been requested of the BLM Washington Office. If approved, this will push back completion of the plan from December 2008 to July 2010.

The Sierra Front-Northwestern Great Basin Resource Advisory Council (RAC) subgroup met with the WFO RMP Team on January 11, 2008, to assist in the development of the Best Management Practices and Standard Operating Procedures that will be adopted by the District in conjunction with the RMP.

The Draft RMP/EIS has been reviewed by the District (Field) Office. The Nevada State Office and the Solicitor's Office are just completing their respective reviews. The next step is to incorporate the comments submitted by the State Office and Solicitor's Office into the draft document. That step is anticipated to take approximately 3 weeks. The Draft will then be sent to the Washington Office for their review. Public review of the Draft RMP/EIS is scheduled to begin in late summer/early fall 2008.

### **BLACK ROCK DESERT – HIGH ROCK CANYON EMIGRANT TRAILS NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA & ASSOCIATED WILDERNESS**

**Wilderness Management Plan** - Work continues on the Wilderness Management Plan for all 10 units with a draft scheduled for public release on or before November 1, 2008. The NCA RAC Subgroup assisted with development of alternatives for the plan at their last meeting on March 15.